

4-H Youth Development, Scholarship and Land-Grant Universities

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Abstract

Beginning with the 4-H professional research and knowledge base in 1986, to the recent launch of an online master's degree in youth development by the GP-IDEA consortium of land-grant universities in 2003, to the implementation of the U.S. Department of Labor's certificate in youth development, youth development is now recognized as a distinct discipline with an identified academic base. As a result, 4-H youth development faculty affiliated with land-grant universities are expected to engage in scholarship. The challenge, however, is to identify appropriate definitions and assessment standards of scholarship in teaching, research, and service and within the four functions outlined by Boyer. This paper summarizes some of the challenges facing 4-H youth development scholarship and its relationship with land-grant universities.

Background

In its report, *Returning to Our Roots: the Engaged Institution* (1999), the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities issued a call to all public-supported universities to become engaged with individual citizens, organizations, businesses, and communities. Through such engagement, the commission argued, land-grant universities and other state-supported institutions can more positively impact the quality of life for individuals and communities.

Shortly thereafter, the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) responded to the commission's call by creating the "Extension Vision for the 21st Century Committee." This committee's report, *The Extension System: A Vision for the 21st Century* (2002), presents some essential elements of a vision for extension as an integral part of university-wide engagement. Some of the most pressing recommendations in this report (ECOP 2002, 7) were that extension should:

- build agreement within the university on how to define the scholarship of engagement; advocate for the development of measures for documenting and evaluating that scholarship;
- provide the leadership necessary to gain the acceptance and implementation of an appropriate definition of engagement scholarship;
- develop position descriptions that define the expectations for engagement and define how employees will be evaluated for scholarly achievement.

As a result, key extension leaders (e.g., former ECOP chair Dr. Lyla Hougلام) have called upon 4-H to define and articulate appropriate standards for scholarship in the field of youth development. This paper is intended to address these critical issues.

The Profession of Youth Development

Lately, there has been much discussion about how to professionalize youth development. Using Greenwood's seminal work

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(1957) as a starting point, five attributes have served as a framework for defining the youth development profession. In this model, scholarship is pivotal because a hallmark of a profession is that it develops a body of systematic theory that informs practice (Greenwood 1957; Hahn and Raley 1998). But there has been little attention given to the types of scholarship in which youth development professionals might be engaged.

In the discussion about scholarship and outreach, land-grant universities have the opportunity to take a leading role to professionalize and elevate the field of youth development. One strategy to accomplish this result is to articulate appropriate standards for assessing 4-H youth development scholarship since 4-H, as a component of the land-grant extension service, is the only youth development program affiliated with universities. This unique role for 4-H youth development brings with it responsibilities for scholarship that are not incumbent on other youth development programs such as Scouts, the Ys, Boys and Girls Clubs or Big Brothers and Big Sisters.

Universities have often played a pivotal role in “training and professionalizing those vocations that society judged critical to its functioning” (*Bonnen 1998, 31*). By helping to advance these vocations as professions, universities have helped stabilize training, established common standards for professional practice, and bestowed a greater legitimacy upon vocations so that they have been able to attract talented individuals and serve a greater portion of society (*Bonnen 1998; Greenwood 1957; Hahn and Raley 1998*). Land-grant universities can play the same role for youth development.

As a result, the issue of scholarship has many far-reaching ramifications beyond the narrow issues of promotion and tenure for those with academic rank. Indeed, the issue of scholarship is central to ensuring the relevance and usefulness of 4-H youth development work at all levels, but especially within land-grant universities. Defining youth development scholarship, even for those whose major responsibilities include supporting a complex organizational program and its clientele, will advance the movement toward professionalization.

The Challenges Facing 4-H Youth Development Scholarship in Land-Grant Universities

4-H professionals within a state or county often have widely varying job descriptions. Some must spend a large portion of their time on organizational maintenance. Because of the 4-H program’s diverse expectations and unique programmatic demands (that are ignored only at one’s peril), 4-H professionals have widely varying abilities to engage in scholarship. Some 4-H youth professionals are on tenure and promotion tracks. Some 4-H professionals have higher scholarly expectations than others and thus more freedom of action and thought; others do not. These kinds of differences must be accounted for and included in any articulation of youth development scholarship. For those associated with land-grant universities, 4-H youth development professionals must approach their work in scholarly ways—as “an approach to doing work—that scholarship is an integral part of that work, rather than a discrete piece of it” (*Wise, Retzleff and Reilly 2002, 14*).

Rather than bemoan the calls for scholarship, 4-H youth development professionals should recognize and celebrate its importance to the quality of their work. At the same time, 4-H faculty must help the academy move beyond its emphasis on

research as the preferred form of scholarship. Youth development professionals should insist that scholarship can and must be interpreted in ways that best reflect the professional activities of its youth development faculty. This kind of scholarship involves “the thoughtful discovery, transmission and application of knowledge” (*Hyman et al. 2000; Wise, Retzleff and Reilly 2002*, 2). As Boyer (*1990*) so eloquently pointed out, it is time to define the work of university faculty in ways that are in tune with the public’s expectations for those affiliated with institutions of higher learning.

Through a lively debate about youth development scholarship, it will be possible to change the culture of promotion and tenure within land-grant universities where 4-H youth development professionals are regarded as less than scholarly practitioners who are undeserving of academic status (*McDowell 2001*). The purpose of this paper is to reaffirm 4-H’s academic foundations and credentials, demonstrate its roots in interdisciplinary fields, and begin the process of changing misperceptions about the discipline of youth development.

For example, the University of Massachusetts (a land-grant) recently decided to cut all funding for 4-H outreach in favor of funding research and teaching because these two functions are considered more “core” to the mission of the university (*Burge 2003*). Understandably, some have now questioned whether the University of Massachusetts is reneging on its land-grant mission. And this effort comes despite evidence like a survey at Purdue University that found that more than 50 percent of the incoming freshman class in the School of Agriculture were former 4-H members (*Goecker 2001*).

Meanwhile, others recognize and support the increasing professionalization of youth development and are seeking ways to credential their youth development practitioners by raising academic standards and requirements. The U.S. Department of Labor, for example, has weighed in on the future importance of the youth development field by identifying “youth development” as one of over 850 apprenticeable occupations. The youth development certificate requires some 343 hours of formal instruction and three to four thousand hours of on-the-job training (see <<http://www.ydpaclearinghouse.org/>>). Since the apprenticeship model has only recently been adapted to occupations in the social services, several national organizations were awarded competitive grants to develop, register and implement youth development

practitioner apprenticeship certificate programs through the U.S. Department of Labor. 4-H was one of the organizations receiving a start-up grant in 2002.

Another example is the recent launch of an online master's degree and professional certificates in youth development through the Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (<<http://www.gpidea.org>>). Five land-grant universities have pooled their faculty resources to offer a 36-credit master's program in youth development. Clearly, on the national level, the field of youth development is moving toward a stronger grounding in existing knowledge and research (*National Research Council 2002*).

4-H Youth Development Scholarship Considered

In order to understand what scholarship includes, we must first revisit the concept of "scholarship." In the landmark book *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, Ernest L. Boyer (1990) argued for moving beyond the "teaching versus research" debate at universities to "give the familiar and honorable term 'scholarship' a broader, more capacious meaning, one that brings legitimacy to the full scope of academic work" (16). Boyer proposed that the work of faculty members be classified into four separate but overlapping functions: the scholarships of discovery, integration, application, and teaching.

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While there are several definitions of scholarship, most articulate a common theme. Here, we define scholarship as *intellectual work whose significance and relevance is validated by one's peers and that is communicated to others, so that human knowledge advances and so that others can improve educational programs*. More specifically, such work—in its diverse forms—is based on a high level of professional expertise grounded in an identifiable body of knowledge; is original; is relevant and valued by those who would use it; must be documented and validated through peer review or critique; and must be communicated in appropriate ways so as to have impact on or significance for various publics beyond

the university, or for the discipline itself. This articulation distinguishes scholarship from "good community work" and grounds it in original intellectual work that is validated and communicated to others (*McDowell 2001; Oregon State University 1999; Wise, Retzleff and Reilly 2002*). Not all forms of scholarship are university scholarship, however. "University scholarship is scholarship that fulfills the mission of the university" (*Hyman et al. 2000, 2*).

Faculty who adopt a scholarly approach elevate the quality of their work by contributing original work, having it reviewed by peers as relevant, communicating it to others, and making certain that it is valued by those for whom such work is intended. Thus, 4-H professionals who engage in scholarship must use their ties to academia to stay current and relevant in youth development and other fields. Where they once might have been isolated from campus disciplines or departments, today's 4-H youth development professionals are connected across campus with a variety of disciplines. At one time it might have been said that a 4-H professional's field of expertise included more "about the animals it teaches the kids to raise than it does about the kids" (*McDowell 2001, 157*). Today's 4-H youth development professional must be attuned to child and adolescent development, theories of learning, best practices in positive youth development, and knowledge from fields related to their work with youth and families (for example, see the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents [NAE4-HA] Core Competencies for Youth Development Professionals 1994).

As Boyer and others have argued, universities must recognize a range of youth development scholarship activities that go beyond the traditional "publish or perish" mentality found in many institutions. In 4-H youth development, validation and communication most often come from some form of presentation to professional peers, such as workshops, seminars, or poster sessions rather than through a new numbered publication or peer-reviewed journal article, although these are also appropriate outlets. But youth development scholarship is more than even these examples imply. An overemphasis on publishing in a few scholarly journals diminishes the richness of youth development scholarship and demeans the value of other kinds of scholarship.

In his seminal work, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Boyer identified four functions of scholarship. More recent work (*Hyman et al. 2000*) has reframed Boyer's work by integrating three forms of university scholarship—teaching, research, and service—with

four functions of scholarship—discovery, integration, application, and education. We support the notion that the four functions of university scholarship are manifest in all three forms of the land-grant mission. For instance, “education can occur not only through teaching, but also through research and service scholarship” (*Hyman et al. 2001*, 47). In this paper, the word “learning” replaces education as more descriptive of a two-way exchange envisioned by the concept of engagement. With that said, let us now examine these four functions of scholarship and provide some relevant youth development examples of each that cut across the three forms of university scholarship.

Scholarship of Learning

As all extension professionals know, teaching is a major part of what they do every day—with youth, with volunteers, with adults, with colleagues and with other educators. Scholarship becomes real only when it is understood by others, and learning is one avenue for fostering understanding. “Teaching as scholarship means not only transmitting knowledge, but transforming and extending it as well” (*Small and Bogenschneider 1998*, 258). The purpose of learning should be to both enlighten and entice future scholars. And as many professionals also know, the very art of education is the subject of much research itself. Research can be used to improve learning strategies, techniques, and methods. The intellectual work involved in learning is also scholarship if it is shared with peers in journals, in formal presentations at professional meetings, or in comparable peer-evaluated forums (*Hyman et al. 2000*).

Excellence in learning is characterized by individuals who are well-informed and steeped in the knowledge of their fields. The youth development scholarship of learning, then, is defined as creative, dynamic work that is validated by peers, and that results in learning and growth by the teacher and the learner, but that also builds bridges between the teacher’s understanding and the student’s learning. The scholarship of learning focuses on asking, “What difference has this learning experience meant for the participants and for the teacher?”

The scholarship of learning is based on a combination of systematic peer evaluations; self-reflection; tabulated responses from learners; and evaluation, by participant representatives, of materials in the dossier. Peer evaluations should be based both on

instructional observations and on review of course syllabi, instructional lesson plans, texts, assigned reading, examinations (if any), and class materials, if appropriate. Where possible, evaluation is enhanced by specific evidence or documentation of participant learning or practice adoption. Peer review of a portfolio of educational resources might include examples of student work, syllabi, photographs, video examples of the learning environment, and other resources that help document the scholarship of learning.

Examples of the scholarship of learning in 4-H youth development:

- Teaching the fundamentals of positive youth development to general or professional audiences, government agencies, or faith-based groups
- Presenting workshops, courses, modules, or seminars where the participants adopt the recommended practices
- Writing and presenting a new publication or series of publications, such as 4-H Master Anglers or 4-H Adventures, that is reviewed and approved by peers as accurate and relevant
- Improving volunteer leader effectiveness by providing training using a New Leader Education Program from another state
- Incorporation of research findings into new methods of teaching established programs
- Developing an online method of teaching 4-H youngsters record-keeping skills
- Mentoring students in theses or other research projects
- Teaching others how to be informed consumers of youth development research.

Scholarship of Discovery

The scholarship of discovery connotes a commitment to knowledge for its own sake, to freedom of inquiry and to following an investigation into the “whys” of our world, wherever these questions might lead. Scholarly investigation is at the heart of academic life, and the pursuit of knowledge should be cultivated and encouraged in all fields, including 4-H youth development. The scholarship of discovery focuses on asking, “What is yet to be known?”

This form of scholarship comes closest to the traditional understanding of scholarship as research, but the new, broader vision of such work is called “discovery.” The process of discovery is central

to the work of higher learning and should be strengthened, not diminished. Those affiliated with institutions of higher learning must demonstrate the capacity to study a serious intellectual problem and present the results to colleagues. As Boyer points out: "Indeed, this is what the dissertation, or a comparable piece of creative work, is all about" (1990, 27).

However, the scholarship of discovery should not carry a preponderant influence in considerations for tenure and promotion for 4-H youth development professionals. Traditional academia has placed an undue importance on this sole function at the expense of other skills and talents of faculty. In many county faculty positions, for example, opportunities for discovery are quite limited and constrained by lack of resources, lack of access to other researchers, technology limitations, and human subjects considerations. It is unrealistic to expect all faculty, regardless of their interests or job descriptions, to engage in research and publish on a regular basis.

For 4-H youth development professionals, indicators of this kind of scholarship may include staying in touch with the broader field of youth development—reading the literature and keeping well-informed about trends and new developments. Further, 4-H professionals might select two or three of the most important new developments or significant new articles in the field and present summaries of their points, including implications for practice. Such papers, especially if peer reviewed, would indicate that 4-H professionals are conversant with developments in the field of youth development and are remaining "intellectually alive" (Boyer 1990).

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Examples of the scholarship of discovery in 4-H youth development:

- Funded research or evaluation projects, grants, or contracts that result in educational products or reports
- Program evaluation research
- University of Wisconsin Teen Assessment Project

- Montana 4-H Out-of-School Time Research Project
- Communicating local results from the WSU/MSU 4-H Life Skills On-Line Evaluation System (for example, see <<http://www.montana.edu/4h>>)
- Locally designed youth assessments or surveys
- Papers presented at professional conferences that communicate original, creative or discovery findings.

Scholarship of Integration

The scholarship of integration means that faculty must give meaning to isolated facts by putting them in perspective and making connections between research and practice (*Small and Bogen-schneider 1998*). This kind of scholarship bridges the gap between research and practice, yet is grounded in theory. Connections can

also be made across the disciplines, illuminating data in novel and revealing ways or revealing new patterns and trends in existing research. The scholarship of integration involves seeking out credible interpretations, drawing together seemingly unconnected information, contributing new insights to original research, and fitting those findings into larger intellectual patterns. It is through this connectedness that research is made authentic.

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The scholarship of integration focuses on asking, "What do these research findings actually mean?" Thus, the scholarship of integration engages the power of critical thinking, analysis, and interpretation. Providing such distillations and interpretations is increasingly an important role for scholars today.

For 4-H youth development professionals, writing for "popular" audiences should be recognized as a credible form of the scholarship of integration. As Boyer points out, "to make complex ideas understandable to a larger audience can be a difficult, demanding task, one that requires not only a deep and thorough knowledge of one's field, but keen literary skills. . ." (1990, 35). This form of scholarship should be recognized and rewarded.

Developing criteria to assess such work and finding qualified peers to review such writings in “popular” publications might be difficult but still important. Since these kinds of broader communication should demand serious consideration within the academy, some key standards of assessment might include:

- Does the work show a careful understanding of the field?
- Have key issues been well defined and creative insights well presented?
- Has the essential message been clarified for a nontechnical audience?
- In what ways has the public discourse been advanced by this interpretation?

Examples of the scholarship of integration in 4-H youth development:

- Publishing a newsletter to parents in the county explaining recent research on child-rearing practices and implications for families that is reviewed and validated by peers
- Implementation of a successful volunteer retention program in the local county
- Adaptation of challenge “ropes course” programs for use in a juvenile corrections facility
- Integration of concepts from several sources to design a new program based on recent research about the effectiveness of youth-adult partnerships
- Application of a mentor/aide program in summer and after-school programs
- Utilizing and applying existing data sets to understand social issues related to today’s youth and their needs.

Scholarship of Application

The scholarship of application asks the question, “How can knowledge be responsibly applied to the important problems of today and tomorrow?” The faculty member involved in this kind of scholarship asks how social problems themselves can define an agenda for scholarly investigation. The process of application is reciprocal and dynamic (*Small and Bogenschneider 1998*). For example, a 4-H youth development professional might investigate the social conditions of young people in the community and publicize the results through a column in the newspaper. These results

might suggest the need for additional avenues of scholarly inquiry and the application of program models to the problems identified, with new knowledge resulting from the act of application.

Thus, this form of scholarship makes the scholarship of discovery and the scholarship of integration “practical” and useful. This type of scholarship is a primary method of 4-H youth development educators who must, of necessity, focus on programming for youth development at the county and state levels. Unfortunately, this form of scholarship has not been given enough credit in traditional promotion and tenure processes, yet it is the heart of 4-H youth development work. This kind of scholarship is carried out through consulting, technical assistance, policy analysis, and program evaluation as well as other related activities.

Examples of the scholarship of application in 4-H youth development:

- Studying the needs of local youth and publishing the results in a public document that has been reviewed and validated by peers
- Applications of youth development research scholarship in the field, including other youth organizations and government agencies
- Membership and participation in professional and learned societies
- Serving as an expert consultant to the county children and youth advisory committee, using research and the professional’s knowledge of best practices to improve parenting programs in the county
- Appointment to the state’s children’s trust fund board of directors as a recognized expert with resources and the ability to integrate information from several sources to strengthen state efforts to reduce child abuse and neglect
- Serving on a local commission dedicated to providing programs to improve parenting practices
- Consulting, involving new applications of knowledge based on the faculty member’s expertise
- Promoting youth/adult partnerships to strengthen local youth-serving organizations.

Conclusion

What is needed today is a more validated and inclusive view of what it means to be a 4-H youth development scholar. Academia must recognize that knowledge is acquired through discovery, through synthesis, through practice, and through education. This will mean a change in university culture (*Lerner and Simon 1998a*) that must begin with organizations like the National Association of Extension 4-H Agents, the Joint Council of Extension Professionals (JCEP), and the National 4-H Leadership Trust (*Small and Bogen-schneider 1998*). By "building teams of colleagues that exemplify the integrations that are embodied in the . . . concept of campus cultural change," it becomes possible to broaden the definition of scholarship within the academy (*Lerner and Simon 1998a, 468*). As McDowell (2001, 182) observes:

Until there is discussion within the scholarly societies about the character of scholarship they are prepared to affirm, and perhaps even provide forums for, there is unlikely to be much change in the culture of the academy.

While the kinds of scholarship for faculty across the range of positions in 4-H youth development will vary, the requirement that the significance of the scholarship be validated and be communicated to publics beyond the university will help sustain a uniformly high standard. In some fields, refereed journals and monographs that reach the target audience are the traditional media for communication and peer validation; in others, workshops or informal learning settings are the media for communication and validation. In still other fields, emerging technologies are creating, and will continue to create, entirely new media and methods.

Journals are only one avenue; there are many others relevant to 4-H youth development scholars. For many practicing youth development professionals, the most appropriate place to validate and communicate their scholarly work is at a professional conference, such as the annual meeting of the NAE4-HA, the International Conference on Volunteer Administration, the Association for Experiential Educators, or other professional meetings attended by extension professionals. The key is to think about places where other practicing professionals will have access to the information (*Rutledge 2003*).

Clearly, the future of 4-H in land-grant universities lies in strengthening the scholarly attributions of 4-H professionals, not weakening their connections to academia. In the years ahead,

youth development will inevitably become more professionalized (*Hahn and Raley 1998*).

Those youth development professionals associated with land-grant universities must ensure that they are in the forefront of this movement toward professionalization by producing the kind of university scholarship that advances the field. This paper has outlined some of the ways that youth development scholarship can be understood and assessed.

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